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ABSTRACT

Public Agenda has compiled this review of survey research on the affordability of higher education. Relevant survey findings from research conducted by Public Agenda and by other organizations were reviewed and two focus groups were conducted in Philadelphia, one with members of the general public and one with parents of high school and college students. Five major themes emerged from the review of recent survey research. One is the importance of higher education. In the view of most Americans, it is very important for individuals to receive a higher education. African American and Hispanic parents are even more likely to stress the importance of higher education than does the population as a whole. Many Americans, especially parents, are concerned about the price of higher education. Although they know little about the details, they feel that rising prices threaten to make higher education inaccessible to many people. There is public support for a government role in making college affordable, but the public does not consider this a major priority for government attention. In general, people have not thought through the complexities of financing higher education, but Americans are opposed to approaches that reduce access either by raising tuition or admitting fewer students. Each of 41 endnotes contains a table of summary survey responses. (SLD)

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ED 464 573

The Affordability of Higher Education:

A Review of Recent Survey Research

By John Immerwahr

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Foreword

In 2001, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education asked Public Agenda, a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization, to review available surveys on public opinion related to the affordability of American higher education. The result of this review, *The Affordability of Higher Education: A Review of Recent Survey Research*, updates the National Center's already extensive database on public attitudes about higher education. This report supplements the findings of another National Center report, *Losing Ground: A National Status Report on the Affordability of American Higher Education*. As previous public opinion research reveals, one of the most important concerns for the American public regarding higher education is how to pay the rising price of a college education.

If the current fiscal conditions affecting the states—and higher education—continue, it is very likely that public concerns about the affordability of higher education will intensify. A similar situation occurred in the early 1990s, when tuition at public colleges and universities rose dramatically in many states. A public backlash against these increases emerged, leading to tuition freezes in several states and to tuition rollbacks in others. The backlash also prompted lawmakers—in the states and at the federal level—to create new and to enhance existing tax breaks that help the middle class pay for college. Surveys show that the public understands the need for education and training beyond high school. If recent experience is a reliable guide, the public is likely to insist that government and higher education leaders find ways to maintain access to affordable higher education.

The National Center welcomes the reactions of readers to this report.

Joni Finney
Vice President
The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Preface and Methodology

At the request of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Public Agenda has compiled this review of survey research on the affordability of higher education. We reviewed relevant survey findings from our own research, particularly from two reports prepared by Public Agenda for the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, *Great Expectations* (2000) and *The Price of Admission* (1998). *Taking Stock* (2000), a report from the American Council on Education, also was a useful source. We also reviewed the survey results available on iPoll, an online research database maintained by the Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at the University of Connecticut. We drew primarily on research conducted between January 1997 and August 2001.*

In order to explore some questions raised by the quantitative findings, we conducted two focus groups in the Philadelphia area, one with members of the general public and one with parents of high school and college students.

We have organized our findings around five major themes:

- The perceived importance of higher education;
- Concerns about the price of higher education;
- Beliefs that, despite rising prices, higher education is still accessible;
- Views on the role of government; and
- Views about other steps to keep college affordable.

In the body of the text, we have summarized the data available on each of these themes and on some related subthemes. The endnotes describe the results in greater detail. We conclude with some insights and hypotheses gained from the focus groups.

*All of the survey data in this report comes from polls that were fielded before the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The two focus groups, however, were conducted two weeks after the attacks, on September 25, 2001. Participants in the groups did not seem to be thinking differently about higher education issues as a result of the tragedy. Our data suggest that attitudes on topics not specifically related to terrorism seem to be affected more by issues such as the economy, rather than by the tragedy itself.

Executive Summary

The following major themes emerged from our review of recent survey research on the affordability of higher education in the United States.

The importance of higher education. In the view of most Americans, it's very important for individuals to receive a higher education. Preparation for jobs and career is seen as the primary role for higher education, but the public also stresses the importance of general skills such as maturity and getting along with others. African-American and Hispanic parents stress the importance of college for their children at even higher rates than does the population as a whole.

Concerns about price, confidence about accessibility. Many Americans, especially parents, are concerned about the price of higher education. Although they know very little about the details, they feel that rising prices threaten to make higher education inaccessible to many people. Despite all of the anxiety, however, Americans seem confident that those who are sufficiently qualified and motivated are currently able to attend college. Parents of high school students are optimistic that their children will be able to get a higher education. Our focus group respondents said that even if prices increase, students and families can compensate by "trading down" to a local community college rather than going to a four-year school, or by attending college part-time rather than full-time.

The role of government. There is public support for a government role in making college affordable, but the public does not think that this area should be a major priority for government attention. Our focus group respondents felt that it was more important for government to intervene in other areas (such as health care, retirement, or the environment) in which people really cannot cope without government support. The public supports financial aid generally, and gives most support to tax breaks and work-study.

Other ways to keep college affordable. Although the public has not thought through the complexities of higher education financing, Americans are opposed to approaches that reduce access either by raising tuition or admitting fewer students. They are more sympathetic to approaches that emphasize greater contributions from the state or savings by colleges themselves.

I. The Importance of Higher Education

In the view of most Americans, a college education has now taken on the importance that a high school education had in the past, and has become a necessary ingredient for a good job and comfortable lifestyle. This value is shared even more widely among African-American and Hispanic parents.*

- 84% say that it is extremely (37%) or very (47%) important to have a college degree in order to get ahead.[1]
- 87% strongly (68%) or somewhat (19%) agree that a college education has become as important as a high school diploma used to be.[2]
- 76% say that the country can never have too many college graduates; only 18% say it's possible to reach a point where too many people have a college degree.[3]
- 77% say that getting a college education today is more important than it was ten years ago.[4]
- 62% of parents of high school students say that a college education is absolutely necessary for their child to get; another 35% say it's helpful but not necessary, and only 3% say it's not that important.[5]
- 66% of those who did not go to college wish that they had,[6] and 62% of those who did not go to college feel that having gone to college would have made a significant difference in their current standard of living.[7]

This is not to say, however, that Americans believe a college education guarantees success, or that a lack of a college education condemns people to failure. For example, 67% say that there are still many ways to succeed in today's work world without a college education.[8]

*Percentages in the text or tables may not equal 100% due to rounding or missing answer categories. Unless otherwise noted, the results we report are based on surveys of the general public.

Hispanic parents and African-American parents stress the importance of higher education in even higher numbers than white parents, or the population at large (see Table 1).

Table 1

Do you think that a college education is necessary for a person to be successful in today's work world, or do you think there are many ways to succeed in today's work world without a college education?

% Responding	*Hispanic High School Parents*	*African American High School Parents*	*White High School Parents*	*General Public*
College education is necessary for a person to be successful in today's work world	65	44	32	31
OR				
There are many ways to succeed in today's work world without a college education	34	54	66	67

Source: Great Expectations: *How the Public and Parents—White, African-American, and Hispanic—View Higher Education*, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and Public Agenda, 2000.

Telephone survey conducted by Public Agenda from December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999.

n = 202 Hispanic parents of high school students; 202 African-American parents of high school students; 201 white parents of high school students; 1,015 general public.

Preparation for jobs and career is seen as the primary role for higher education, but the public also stresses the importance of general skills such as maturity and getting along with others.

- 78% strongly agree (38%) or agree (40%) that college is not doing its job if its graduates are not prepared to enter the job market.[9]
- 96% say that career training is a very (72%) or somewhat (24%) important goal for colleges and universities.[10]
- 64% say that the primary purpose of a college education is to prepare students for specific careers, rather than preparing them for work in general or providing them with general knowledge.[11]

But many also say it's important for college students to gain general life skills—for example, strong majorities say it is absolutely essential that college students gain a sense of maturity and how to manage on their own (71%) and learn to get along with people different from themselves (68%). Sixty percent say the same about gaining specific expertise and knowledge in the careers they have chosen.[12]

When asked in another way about the relative importance of a well-rounded education versus job training, the public is divided. Half (51%) of the public say that if they had a child in college, it would be more important for their child to get a well-rounded education; 40% think that training for a well-paying job would be more important.[13]

The majority of Americans feel that colleges and universities do a reasonably good job (especially compared to public high schools), but opinion is divided on whether a higher education is worth the prices that are charged.

- 57% say that colleges in their state are doing an excellent (15%) or good (42%) job, compared to only 33% who say that their public high schools are doing an excellent (6%) or good (27%) job.[14]
- 75% are completely (19%) or somewhat (56%) satisfied with the quality of education received in American colleges and universities today.[15]
- 58% say colleges are doing enough to prepare students for the global economy.[16]
- 54% say a four-year college education is usually worth the price, 36% say that it is sometimes worth the price, and 9% say it is rarely or never worth the price.[17]

Americans are especially divided about the value of college when a price tag is mentioned. Forty-seven percent say that a person gets enough out of a college education to justify spending from $7,000 to $18,000 a year for it, as compared to 40% who think the expense is not justified.[18]

II. Concerns about Price, Confidence about Accessibility

Many Americans, especially parents, are concerned about the price of higher education. Although they know very little about the details, they feel that rising prices threaten to make higher education inaccessible to many people.

- 69% of the parents of high school students are very (29%) or somewhat (40%) worried about being able to afford their children's college education.[19]
- 68% say that by the year 2020, people in their community will be less able to afford a college education for their children.[20]
- 70% think that higher education is being priced beyond the income of the average family, as compared to only 44% who feel that the cost of a house is being priced out of reach, 36% who feel this way about the cost of a secure retirement, and 24% who feel this way about the cost of a car.[21]

The public is divided on whether most qualified and motivated people currently have an opportunity to attend college, with 45% saying that the vast majority have the opportunity, and 47% saying that there are many who do not have the opportunity.[22]

The public is divided about whether students from low-income families have less opportunity to get an education than others. Forty-six percent say that these students have less opportunity, while 51% say they have the same (36%) or more opportunity (15%).[23]

Although public concern is high about how much it costs to attend college, people know little about actual amounts.

- The public regularly overestimates the cost of a college education (see Table 2).
- Only 16% correctly understand that state colleges get more support from state government than from student fees and tuition. Half (52%) say that they just don't know enough to answer the question.[24]

Table 2

Roughly, how much do you think it costs per year to attend the following type of college if you include both tuition and all other costs, such as room and board, books, and other college fees?

Type of college	*Estimated cost (average)*	*Actual cost (average)*
Two-year	$ 10,904	$ 6,000
Public four-year	16,708	10,900
Private four-year	29,537	23,650

Source: *Taking Stock: How Americans Judge Quality, Affordability and Leadership at U.S. Colleges and Universities*, American Council on Education, 2000.

n = 850 general public.

Despite all of the anxiety, Americans seem confident that those who are sufficiently qualified and motivated are currently able to go to college. Parents of high school students are optimistic that their children will be able to get a higher education.

- 75% of parents of high school students say that it is certain (44%) or very likely (31%) their child will attend college, and another 15% say it's somewhat likely. Of these parents, nearly all (93%) say they will "find a way to work out the costs."[25]
- Only 23% of parents of young children are very worried that they won't be able to afford to send their child to college (another 29% say they worry some).[26]
- 87% strongly (63%) or somewhat (24%) agree that if someone really wants to go to college, they can find a way to pay for it, even if they have to go to school and work at the same time.[27]
- 62% strongly (33%) or somewhat (29%) agree that almost anyone who needs financial help to go to college can get loans or financial aid.[28] Seventy-one percent strongly (23%) or somewhat (48%) agree that colleges and universities make a lot of financial aid available.[29]
- 72% say that it is still possible for a hardworking individual to "achieve the American dream," defined as "making a decent living, owning a home, and sending their children to college."[30]

III. The Role of Government

There is public support for a government role in making college affordable, but the public does not think that this area should be a major priority for government attention.

- 86% strongly (67%) or somewhat (19%) agree that every capable person has a right to receive an education through college, even if he or she cannot afford it.[31]
- 68% think that government—as opposed to business, community, or other institutions—should play a major role in the future in making college education affordable.[32]

But the public is evenly divided on whether the government has a responsibility to make sure every person gets a college education even if he or she cannot afford it, with 48% saying government has a responsibility and 47% saying that it does not.[33]

And compared to other issues (such as health care, the environment, or K–12 education), the public assigns a low priority to higher education affordability (see Table 3).

Table 3

As you know, there are many important issues facing our country, but we have only limited resources for addressing these issues. Keeping this in mind, how much of a priority should the federal government give to...

% Responding	*Very High Priority*	*High Priority*
Ensuring every American has access to affordable health care	39	36
Conserving natural resources	34	43
Setting academic standards for public schools	32	36
Providing decent standard of living for elderly	28	44
Reducing juvenile delinquency	28	32
Ensuring that food and medicines are safe	4	20
Ensuring every American can afford to send their children to college	3	17
Reducing poverty	3	14

Source: Pew Research Center, 1997.

Telephone survey conducted by Princeton Survey Research Associates from September 25, 1997, to October 31, 1997.

n = 1,762 general public.

The public supports financial aid programs generally, and gives most support to tax breaks and work-study (see Table 4).

- 87% of women say that government should play a strong (61%) or somewhat strong (26%) role in creating tax breaks to help parents pay for the cost of college and post–high school training.[34]
- 84% of adults say that they support the college student loan program a great deal (56%) or a fair amount (28%) as a good use of their tax dollars,[35] and 87% think that the federally subsidized college loan program is very (55%) or somewhat (32%) important.[36]
- 55% would prefer a targeted tax cut to help middle- to lower-income families pay for things like college tuition and long-term care, as opposed to an across-the-board tax cut that affects all Americans.[37]
- Note: 73% say that people who receive federal aid for college should be expected to provide something in return, such as community service.[38]

Table 4

I am going to read you several ways for state and federal government to make a college education more affordable to academically qualified students. [INSERT ITEM] Do you think government should use this more often than it does now, less often, or use it about as often as it does now?

% Responding	More Often	Less Often	About as Often
Government gives tax breaks or tax credits to help students and their families pay for college	78	5	15
Government provides students with opportunities to work for the financial aid they get	73	5	18
Government makes money available for student loans	57	4	34
Government grants money directly to students	48	11	34

Source: *Great Expectations*, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and Public Agenda, 2000.

Telephone survey conducted by Public Agenda from December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999.

n = 1,015 general public.

IV. Other Ways to Keep College Affordable

Although the public has not thought through the complexities of higher education financing, Americans are opposed to approaches that reduce access either by raising tuition or admitting fewer students. They are more sympathetic to approaches that emphasize greater contributions from the state or savings by colleges themselves (see Table 5).

Table 5

Suppose the colleges in your state faced a serious shortage of money. What would be the best way to solve the problem? Should the colleges:

Get more funding from the state government	55%
Cut costs and expect professors to teach more classes	22%
Admit fewer students	9%
Charge higher fees and tuition	7%
Don't know	7%

Source: *Great Expectations*, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and Public Agenda, 2000.

Telephone survey conducted by Public Agenda from December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999.

n = 1,015 general public.

Americans feel that colleges need to do a better job of holding down the costs of higher education.

- 83% strongly (60%) or somewhat (23%) agree that colleges should be doing a much better job of keeping their costs down.[39]
- 73% say that it is absolutely essential that college administrators focus on controlling costs and spending money efficiently.[40]
- 60% say that it is absolutely essential that college administrators focus on keeping the price of tuition from rising.[41]

Probing Behind the Findings

For the most part the findings tell a clear story, but in at least two areas there are some apparent contradictions:

- *Affordability versus accessibility.* We found high levels of concern about the rising price of a higher education. At the same time, most people agree with the idea that anyone who really wants a college education can get one. If people are really worried about college prices, one would expect to see less optimism about access.
- *How important a priority for government?* The public feels that qualified and motivated students ought to be able to attain a college education, and a significant majority agrees that government has an important role to play in making higher education accessible, especially by providing tax breaks and work-study opportunities for young people. But strong support for a government role in this area seems to evaporate when people compare it to other important priorities. If government support is so important, why is it assigned such a low priority?

Exploring the contradictions

In order to explore these areas of tension, we conducted two focus groups in the Philadelphia area. Pennsylvania is a state with high tuition prices, and previous studies have shown that affordability issues are particularly salient to Pennsylvania residents. Obviously it is impossible to generalize from the results of two focus groups in a single state, but the comments of these Philadelphia residents are suggestive of hypotheses for further research and investigation.

Trading down

In their initial discussion of higher education issues, the Philadelphia respondents spontaneously expressed both sides of the dilemma we wanted to explore. On the one hand, they were deeply concerned about rising college prices. As one woman said, "College expenses keep going up past the cost of inflation. The salaries keep going up for the teachers, but it seems that the aid is getting cut from the state."

At the same time, the respondents were convinced that college was still accessible for most people. As one woman said, "College is still affordable for most people, if you want to go to college you can do it." Another participant commented, "With student loans, a hardworking kid can go to college if he wants to."

When we asked our respondents to reconcile these comments, they came back with an immediate answer. As they told the story, higher education is one area where the consumer (in this case the student) has a wide range of possibilities. On the one hand, a student can go to an elite private school and pay upwards of $35,000 per year. On the other hand, a student can live at home, work a regular job, go to a local community college, and then finish the last two years at a state university. In either case, the student is getting a higher education, and everyone is aware of success stories of individuals who have excellent careers from just such a background. As one woman said, "If you really want to go to college, there is a way, but it might be bare bones."

The fact that access to college remains intact, however, does not prevent the middle class from feeling they have paid a price. Our focus group respondents felt that the middle class has only been able to absorb the price increases by "trading down" to lower levels of quality. An older man captured the sentiment of the group when he compared higher education to buying a car:

> *It is like getting a new car. Almost everyone can get a new car, but now many people might only be able to afford a Kia. But suppose I want a Buick. That used to be a middle-class car, but it isn't any more. So now people in the middle class can't afford to buy what used to be the middle-class car, let alone something above like the Lexus. In the old days a middle-class family could afford a better college, but now you are going to have to trade down. The same person who would have been going full-time before is now going part-time, or going to a community college for the first two years.*

In effect, these respondents explained that college is getting more expensive and that many are being priced out of choices that would have been available in the past. However, for those who are willing to go "bare bones," college is still within reach.

A ROLE FOR GOVERNMENT

The public's conviction that college is accessible (one way or another) also sheds light on our second question about the public's seemingly ambivalent position on the government's role. We began our Philadelphia groups by asking the participants to prioritize the items listed in the Pew Research Center survey (see Table 3, page 9), modifying the question somewhat by asking them to think about the combined federal and state role in addressing the priorities. For the most part, the participants replicated the response of the survey, assigning higher education a relatively low priority.

The respondents had no difficulty explaining this. While they were quick to acknowledge the importance of a college education, they said college is still accessible for most people—at least at the moment—and therefore not an urgent priority. As one man said, "I gave it a low priority because college is still affordable for most people today. If you want to go to college, you can afford it."

The participants made a distinction between higher education and other areas where government is expected to help, such as health care. People who do not have health insurance typically have a difficult time getting affordable health care. If government does not help them, they really cannot easily solve the problem. On the other hand, the public views higher education more like food or clothing. While these things are important and often expensive, only the poorest people go naked and starve, and there is probably little support for government help to make these items more affordable for the middle class. A man in our Philadelphia focus group made the comparison this way: "College is important, but not like not having medical care. . . . High school is more important than college; if you don't do well in high school, forget college. Cream eventually rises to the top so even if you don't go to college, if you work hard you will benefit."

The focus groups suggest that Americans may be much more likely to throw support to issues where they don't feel that individuals have another alternative. If the government doesn't help the elderly or people who have no health care, no one else is going to jump in to fill the gap. When it comes to higher education, Americans believe that people can help themselves if they are willing to make some sacrifices.

Endnotes

[1] In your opinion, how important is it for people to have a college degree in order to get ahead? Is it: extremely important, very important, neither important nor unimportant, not very important, or not at all important?

Extremely important	37%
Very important	47%
Neither important nor unimportant	08%
Not very important	06%
Not at all important	01%
Not sure	02%

Survey Organization: Yankelovich Partners
Sponsor: Time, Cable News Network
Field Dates: September 10, 1997, to September 12, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 827

[2] A college education has become as important as a high school education used to be. Do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

Strongly agree	68%
Somewhat agree	19%
Somewhat disagree	08%
Strongly disagree	04%
Don't know	02%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

[3] In your view, is it possible for the U.S. to reach a point where too many people have a college degree, or is this one area where there can never be too much of a good thing?

It is possible to reach a point	18%
Can never be too much	76%
Don't know	06%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

4 Compared to ten years ago, would you say getting a college degree today is more important, less important, or about the same?

More important	77%
Less important	05%
About the same	17%
Don't know	01%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

5 When it comes to your own child/Thinking of your oldest child, do you think a college education is something absolutely necessary to get, something helpful but not necessary, or not that important?

Absolutely necessary	62%
Helpful but not necessary	35%
Not that important	03%
Don't know	*

* Less than 0.5%
Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: Parents of high school students
Sample Size: 200

6 Do you wish you had gone to college, or not?

Yes	66%
No	27%
Presently in college/Will attend in fall (volunteered)	05%
Don't know/No answer	02%

Note: Asked of those who said the last grade they completed was high school graduate or less (54% of sample).
Survey Organization: CBS News
Field Dates: August 17, 1997, to August 19, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,307

7 If you had gone to college, do you think that would have made a significant difference in your current standard of living, or not?

Yes	62%
No	35%
Don't know/No answer	03%

Note: Asked of those who said the last grade they completed was high school graduate or less (54% of sample).
Survey Organization: CBS News
Field Dates: August 17, 1997, to August 19, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,307

8 Do you think that a college education is necessary for a person to be successful in today's work world, or do you think that there are many ways to succeed in today's work world without a college education?

College education is necessary for a person to be successful in today's work world	31%
There are many ways to succeed without a college education	67%
Don't know	03%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

9 I am going to read you a series of statements about colleges. Please tell me if you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement. College is not doing its job if its graduates are not prepared to enter the job market.

Strongly agree	38%
Agree	40%
Disagree	16%
Strongly disagree	02%
Don't know	04%

Survey Organization: Daniel Yankelovich Group
Sponsor: Ford Foundation's Campus Diversity Initiative
Field Dates: July 14, 1998, to August 4, 1998
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National registered voters
Sample Size: 2,011

10 I'd like to talk with you for a few moments about the goals of higher education. Colleges and universities attempt to achieve specific educational goals. For each goal I read, tell me whether you think that achieving the goal is very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not important at all. . . . Career training or re-training.

Very important	72%
Somewhat important	24%
Not too important	02%
Not important at all	01%
Don't know/No answer	01%

Survey Organization: Daniel Yankelovich Group
Sponsor: Ford Foundation's Campus Diversity Initiative
Field Dates: July 14, 1998, to August 4, 1998
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National registered voters
Sample Size: 2,011

11 What do you think is the primary purpose of a college education? I am going to read you a list, please tell me which one is the most important purpose. Is it to: provide students with general knowledge, prepare students for work in general, or prepare students for specific careers?

Provide students with general knowledge	19%
Prepare students for work in general	16%
Prepare students for specific careers	64%
Don't know	02%

Survey Organization: Center for Survey Research and Analysis, University of Connecticut
Sponsor: Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut, and Heldrich Center at Rutgers
Field Dates: May 10, 2000, to May 29, 2000
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National employed adults (see note)
Sample Size: 1,014
Study Note: The survey was a joint project of the Center for Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut, and the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University. The sample includes adults employed full- or part-time and those unemployed looking for work.

12 How important is each of the following in terms of what students should gain from attending college?

A sense of maturity and how to manage on their own	
Absolutely essential	71%
Important but not essential	26%
Not too important	02%

An ability to get along with people different from themselves	
Absolutely essential	68%
Important but not essential	29%
Not too important	02%

Specific expertise and knowledge in the careers they have chosen	
Absolutely essential	60%
Important but not essential	35%
Not too important	04%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

13 If you had a child in college, do you think it would be more important for them to get a well-rounded education, or more important for them to get training for a well-paying job?

Well-rounded education	51%
Well-paying job	40%
Both/Neither (volunteered)	06%
Don't know/No answer	03%

Survey Organization: CBS News
Field Dates: August 17, 1997, to August 19, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,307

14 Overall, how good a job are the colleges in your state doing? Would you say they are doing an excellent, good, fair, or poor job, or don't you know enough to say?

Excellent	15%
Good	42%
Fair	13%
Poor	03%
Don't know	28%

Are the public high schools in your state doing an excellent, good, fair, or poor job, or don't you know enough to say?

Excellent	06%
Good	27%
Fair	28%
Poor	13%
Don't know	25%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

15 How satisfied are you with the quality of education which college students receive in American colleges and universities today? Would you say completely satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, or completely dissatisfied?

Completely satisfied	19%
Somewhat satisfied	56%
Somewhat dissatisfied	17%
Completely dissatisfied	04%
No opinion	04%

Survey Organization: Gallup Organization
Field Dates: August 24, 1999, to August 26, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,028

16 Overall, do you believe colleges and universities are doing enough to prepare their students to compete in today's global economy?

Yes	58%
No	37%
Don't know/refused	05%

Survey Organization: KRC Research and Consulting
Sponsor: American Council on Education
Field Dates: May 2000
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 850

17 Would you say a four-year college education for your children, or yourself, is...

Usually worth the price	54%
Sometimes worth the price	36%
Rarely worth the price	07%
Never worth the price	02%
Don't know/refused	02%

Survey Organization: KRC Research and Consulting
Sponsor: American Council on Education
Field Dates: May 2000
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 850

18 A college education can now cost on average from $7,000 to $18,000 a year. Do you think a person gets enough out of a college education to justify what they might pay for it?

Yes	47%
No	40%
Don't know/No answer	13%

Survey Organization: CBS News
Field Dates: August 17, 1997, to August 19, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,307

19 How worried are you about being able to afford to pay for college expenses? Are you very worried, somewhat worried, or not too worried?

Very worried	29%
Somewhat worried	40%
Not too worried	32%
Don't know	*

* Less than 0.5%
Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National parents of high school students
Sample Size: 178

See also:
(As I read a list of concerns about growing up today, please tell me how concerned you are about each one (aspect of raising teens today)?) What about . . . the cost of your child's college education? Does this worry you a lot, a little, or not at all?

A lot	68%
A little	23%
Not at all	09%
Don't know	*

* Less than 0.5%
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Field Dates: Apr 20, 2000 to Apr 28, 2000
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult parents of teens ages 13 to 19
Sample Size: 509
Study Note: A parallel survey of teens was conducted and the results are available from the Roper Center.

20 By the year 2020, do you think people like you in your community will be more or less able to afford . . . college education for children?

More able to afford	29%
Less able to afford	68%
Don't know/Refused	03%

Survey Organization: Louis Harris & Associates
Field Dates: November 11, 1998, to November 15, 1998
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,010

21 Which of the following items do you worry is being priced beyond the income of the average family? Cost of children's college education, cost of a house, cost of a secure retirement, cost of a car.

Cost of children's college education	70%
Cost of a house	44%
Cost of a secure retirement	36%
Cost of a car	24%
None (volunteered)	02%
Not sure	02%

Notes: Asked of Form B half sample. Adds to more than 100% due to multiple responses.
Survey Organization: Hart and Teeter Research Companies
Sponsor: NBC News, Wall Street Journal
Field Dates: December 3, 1998, to December 6, 1998
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 2,106

22 Do you believe that currently in your state, the vast majority of people who are qualified to go to college have the opportunity to do so, or do you think there are many people who are qualified to go but don't have the opportunity to do so?

Vast majority of those qualified have the opportunity	45%
There are many people who don't have the opportunity	47%
Don't know	08%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

23 Do you think qualified students from [INSERT ITEM] have less opportunity, more opportunity, or about the same opportunity as others to get a college education

% Responding	*Less*	*More*	*About the Same*
Qualified students from low-income families, regardless of their ethnic background	46	15	36
People who are older and are going back to school for retraining	37	15	42
Qualified students who are ethnic or racial minorities, such as blacks or Latinos	29	25	41
Qualified students from middle-class families, regardless of their ethnic background	16	22	60

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

24 Where do you think the state colleges in your area get most of their money? Is it from student fees and tuition, from the state government, from both about equally, or don't you know enough to say?

From student fees and tuition	10%
From the state government	16%
From both about equally	22%
Don't know	52%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

25 How likely is it that your child will attend college after graduating high school?

Certain	44%
Very likely	31%
Somewhat likely	15%
Not too likely	10%
Don't know	01%

Do you think you will find a way to work out costs, or do you seriously doubt that college will be affordable for your child?

Will find a way	93%
Seriously doubt that college will be affordable	05%
Don't know	02%

Note: Asked of parents of children in high school who say it is certain/very likely/somewhat likely that their child will attend college after graduating.

Survey Organization: Public Agenda

Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education

Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999

Interview Method: Telephone

Sample: National parents of children in high school

Sample Size: 178

26 (Please tell me how much you worry about each of the following when you think about (child)'s future.) How much do you worry that . . . you won't be able to afford to send (him/her) to college? . . . Do you worry a lot, some, only a little, or not at all?

A lot	23%
Some	29%
Only a little	20%
Not at all	28%

Survey Organization: Princeton Survey Research Associates

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Field Dates: February 25, 1997, to March 2, 1997

Interview Method: Telephone

Sample: National parents ages 18 to 44 with children up to age 3

Sample Size: 506

27 If someone really wants to go to college, they can find a way to pay for it, even if they have to go to school and work at the same time. Do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

Strongly agree	63%
Somewhat agree	24%
Somewhat disagree	08%
Strongly disagree	05%
Don't know	01%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

28 Almost anyone who needs financial help to go to college can get loans or financial aid. Do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

Strongly agree	33%
Somewhat agree	29%
Somewhat disagree	17%
Strongly disagree	15%
Don't know	06%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

29 Colleges and universities make a lot of financial aid available.

Strongly agree	23%
Somewhat agree	48%
Somewhat disagree	15%
Strongly disagree	07%
Don't know/refused	07%

Survey Organization: KRC Research and Consulting
Sponsor: American Council on Education
Field Dates: May 2000
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 850

30 Do you think that if an individual works hard, they can still achieve the "American Dream" of making a decent living, owning a home, and sending their children to college?

Yes	72%
No	24%
Not sure	04%

Survey Organization: Opinion Dynamics
Sponsor: Fox News
Field Dates: February 19, 1997, to February 20, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National registered voters
Sample Size: 900

31 I'd like you to tell me whether you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly with this statement: Every capable person has a right to receive an education through college, even if he or she cannot afford it.

Agree strongly	67%
Agree somewhat	19%
Disagree somewhat	08%
Disagree strongly	05%
Don't know/No answer	02%

Survey Organization: CBS News
Field Dates: August 17, 1997, to August 19, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,307

32 (Still looking ahead to the next century, I would like to know how big a role you think that government should play on different issues, as opposed to business, community organizations, or other institutions that might also deal with these issues.) In the future, do you think that government should play a minor role, a medium role, or a major role in the area of . . . making college education affordable?

Minor role	11%
Medium role	18%
Major role	68%
Not sure	03%

Note: Asked of Form B half sample
Survey Organization: Hart and Teeter Research Companies
Sponsor: The Council For Excellence in Government
Field Dates: May 21, 1999, to June 1, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,214

33 Do you think the federal government has a responsibility to make sure every qualified person gets a college education even if he or she cannot afford it, or doesn't the federal government have that responsibility?

Has responsibility	48%
Doesn't have responsibility	47%
Don't know/No answer	06%

Survey Organization: CBS News
Field Dates: August 17, 1997, to August 19, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,307

34 (Let me read you some areas people have given for federal government involvement and for each one please tell me, regardless of whether you favor or oppose the idea, if you think the federal government should play a very strong role in that area, somewhat a strong role, not too strong of a role, or no role at all.) . . . Creating tax breaks to help parents pay for the cost of college education and post–high school training and related expenses in public education.

Strong role	61%
Somewhat strong role	26%
Not strong role	07%
No role at all	06%

Survey Organization: Lake, Snell, Perry, and Associates
Sponsor: American Association of University Women
Field Dates: June 1998
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National registered women voters
Sample Size: 600

35 (For each of the following federal government programs, I would like to know how much you personally support this as a good use of your tax dollars.) Do you support . . . the college student loan program . . . a great deal, a fair amount, just a little, or not at all?

Support a great deal	56%
Support a fair amount	28%
Support just a little	08%
Do not support at all	06%
Not sure	02%

Note: Asked of Form B half sample
Survey Organization: Hart and Teeter Research Companies
Sponsor: Council for Excellence in Government
Field Dates: February 20, 1997, to February 24, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,003

36 (I'm going to read you a list of federal government programs and for each one, please tell me how important you think this program is. Is it very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important?) What about . . . federally subsidized loans for college students?

Very important	55%
Somewhat important	32%
Not very important	07%
Not at all important	05%
Don't know	*

* Less than 0.5%

Survey Organization: ICR Survey Research Group
Sponsor: National Public Radio, Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government
Field Dates: March 4, 1999, to March 24, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,203

37 If there is a tax cut, would you prefer to see . . . an across-the-board tax cut that affects all Americans, or a targeted tax cut to help middle- to lower-income families pay for things like college tuition and long-term care?

An across-the-board tax cut that affects all Americans	39%
A targeted tax cut to help middle- to lower-income families pay for things like college tuition and long-term care	55%
Oppose either kind of tax cut (volunteered)	01%
Don't know	05%

Note: Asked of registered voters, those not having to register, and those who are non-registered but plan to register so they can vote in the November 2000 election (86% of sample)
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Field Dates: August 24, 2000, to August 25, 2000
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 923

38 Some people say people who receive federal aid for college should be expected to provide something in return, such as community service. Others say students should be able to receive federal aid for college without having to do community service. Which is closer to your view?

Provide service	73%
Unfair to require service	24%
Don't know	03%

Survey Organization: Penn, Schoen & Berland Associates
Sponsor: Democratic Leadership Council
Field Dates: July 23, 1997, to July 27, 1997
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National registered voters
Sample Size: 1,009

39 Today's colleges should be doing a much better job of keeping their costs down. Do you agree or disagree? Is that strongly or somewhat?

Strongly agree	60%
Somewhat agree	23%
Somewhat disagree	07%
Strongly disagree	04%
Don't know	06%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

40 Now I'd like to ask you how important each of the following things are for college administrators—the people running the schools—to focus on accomplishing. How about . . . control costs and spend money efficiently? Is that absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important?

Absolutely essential	73%
Important but not essential	24%
Not too important	02%
Don't know	01%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

41 Now I'd like to ask you how important each of the following things are for college administrators—the people running the schools—to focus on accomplishing. How about . . . keep the price of tuition from rising? Is that absolutely essential, important but not essential, or not too important?

Absolutely essential	60%
Important but not essential	35%
Not too important	03%
Don't know	02%

Survey Organization: Public Agenda
Sponsor: National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education
Field Dates: December 2, 1999, to December 14, 1999
Interview Method: Telephone
Sample: National adult
Sample Size: 1,015

About the Author

John Immerwahr is Senior Research Fellow at Public Agenda and Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs at Villanova University. He has written several Public Agenda reports on higher education, including *Great Expectations: How the Public and Parents View Higher Education* (2000), *Taking Responsibility: Leaders' Expectations of Higher Education* (1999), *Doing Comparatively Well: Why the Public Loves Higher Education and Criticizes K–12* (1999), *The Price of Admission: The Growing Importance of Higher Education* (1998), *Preserving the Higher Education Legacy: A Conversation with California Leaders* (1995), and *The Closing Gateway: Californians Consider Their Higher Education System* (1993).

In addition, he has authored or co-authored several other Public Agenda reports on education, including the groundbreaking national study, *First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools* (1994), and, for the 1996 National Education Summit of the nation's governors and business leaders, *Americans' Views on Standards: An Assessment by Public Agenda* (1996). Other state-specific studies written by Dr. Immerwahr include: *What Our Children Need: South Carolinians Look at Public Education* (1996) and *The Broken Contract: Connecticut Citizens Look at Public Education* (1993).

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Losing Ground: A National Status Report on the Affordability of American Higher Education (May 2002, #02-3). This national status report documents the declining affordability of higher education for American families, and highlights public policies that support affordable higher education. Provides state-by-state summaries as well as national findings.

The Affordability of Higher Education: A Review of Recent Survey Research, by John Immerwahr (May 2002, #02-4). This review of recent surveys by Public Agenda confirms that Americans feel that rising college prices threaten to make higher education inaccessible for many people.

Coping with Recession: Public Policy, Economic Downturns and Higher Education, by Patrick M. Callan (February 2002, #02-2). Outlines the major policy considerations that states and institutions of higher education face during economic downturns.

Competition and Collaboration in California Higher Education, by Kathy Reeves Bracco and Patrick M. Callan (January 2002, #02-1). Argues that the structure of California's state higher education system limits the system's capacity for collaboration.

Measuring Up 2000: The State-by-State Report Card for Higher Education (November 2000, #00-3). This first-of-its-kind report card grades each state on its performance in higher education. The report card also provides comprehensive profiles of each state and brief states-at-a-glance comparisons. Visit **www.highereducation.org** to download *Measuring Up 2000* or to make your own comparisons of state performance in higher education. Printed copies are available for $25.00 by calling 888-269-3652 (discounts available for large orders).

***Beneath the Surface: A Statistical Analysis of the Major Variables Associated with State Grades in* Measuring Up 2000,** by Alisa F. Cunningham and Jane V. Wellman (November 2001, #01-4). Using statistical analysis, this report explores the "drivers" that predict overall performance in *Measuring Up 2000*.

Supplementary Analysis for* Measuring Up 2000: *An Exploratory Report, by Mario Martinez (November 2001, #01-3). Explores the relationships within and between the performance categories in *Measuring Up 2000*.

***Some Next Steps for States: A Follow-up to* Measuring Up 2000,** by Dennis Jones and Karen Paulson (June 2001, #01-2). What are the next steps states can take to improve performance in higher education? This report provides an introduction to the kinds of actions states can take to bridge the gap between the performance areas identified in *Measuring Up 2000* and the formulation of effective policy.

***A Review of Tests Performed on the Data in* Measuring Up 2000,** by Peter Ewell (June 2001, #01-1). Describes the statistical testing performed on the data in *Measuring Up 2000* by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems.

***Recent State Policy Initiatives in Education: A Supplement to* Measuring Up 2000,** by Aims McGuinness, Jr. (December 2000, #00-6). Highlights education initiatives that states have adopted since 1997–98.

***Assessing Student Learning Outcomes: A Supplement to* Measuring Up 2000,** by Peter Ewell and Paula Ries (December 2000, #00-5). National survey of state efforts to assess student learning outcomes in higher education.

***Technical Guide Documenting Methodology, Indicators and Data Sources for* Measuring Up 2000** (November 2000, #00-4).

A State-by-State Report Card on Higher Education: Prospectus (March 2000, #00-1). Summarizes the goals of the National Center's report card project.

Great Expectations: How the Public and Parents—White, African American and Hispanic—View Higher Education, by John Immerwahr with Tony Foleno (May 2000, #00-2). This report by Public Agenda finds that Americans overwhelmingly see higher education as essential for success. Survey results are also available for the following states:

Great Expectations: *How Pennsylvanians View Higher Education* (May 2000, #00-2b)
Great Expectations: *How Floridians View Higher Education* (August 2000, #00-2c)
Great Expectations: *How Coloradans View Higher Education* (August 2000, #00-2d)
Great Expectations: *How Californians View Higher Education* (August 2000, #00-2e)
Great Expectations: *How New Yorkers View Higher Education* (October 2000, #00-2f)
Great Expectations: *How Illinois Residents View Higher Education* (October 2000, #00-2h)

State Spending for Higher Education in the Next Decade: The Battle to Sustain Current Support, by Harold A. Hovey (July 1999, #99-3). This fiscal forecast of state and local spending patterns finds that the vast majority of states will face significant fiscal deficits over the next eight years, which will in turn lead to increased scrutiny of higher education in almost all states, and to curtailed spending for public higher education in many states.

South Dakota: Developing Policy-Driven Change in Higher Education, by Mario Martinez (June 1999, #99-2). Describes the processes for change in higher education that government, business, and higher education leaders are creating and implementing in South Dakota.

Taking Responsibility: Leaders' Expectations of Higher Education, by John Immerwahr (January 1999, #99-1). Reports the views of those most involved with decision-making about higher education, based on a survey and focus groups conducted by Public Agenda.

The Challenges and Opportunities Facing Higher Education: An Agenda for Policy Research, by Dennis Jones, Peter Ewell, and Aims McGuinness (December 1998, #98-8). Argues that due to substantial changes in the landscape of postsecondary education, new state-level policy frameworks must be developed and implemented.

Higher Education Governance: Balancing Institutional and Market Influences, by Richard C. Richardson, Jr., Kathy Reeves Bracco, Patrick M. Callan, and Joni E. Finney (November 1998, #98-7). Describes the structural relationships that affect institutional effectiveness in higher education, and argues that state policy should strive for a balance between institutional and market forces.

Federal Tuition Tax Credits and State Higher Education Policy: A Guide for State Policy Makers, by Kristin D. Conklin (December 1998, #98-6). Examines the implications of the federal income tax provisions for students and their families, and makes recommendations for state higher education policy.

The Challenges Facing California Higher Education: A Memorandum to the Next Governor of California, by David W. Breneman (September 1998, #98-5). Argues that California should develop a new Master Plan for Higher Education.

Tidal Wave II Revisited: A Review of Earlier Enrollment Projections for California Higher Education, by Gerald C. Hayward, David W. Breneman and Leobardo F. Estrada (September 1998, #98-4). Finds that earlier forecasts of a surge in higher education enrollments were accurate.

Organizing for Learning: The View from the Governor's Office, by James B. Hunt Jr., chair of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and former governor of North Carolina (June 1998, #98-3). An address to the American Association for Higher Education concerning opportunity in higher education.

The Price of Admission: The Growing Importance of Higher Education, by John Immerwahr (Spring 1998, #98-2). A national survey of Americans' views on higher education, conducted and reported by Public Agenda.

Concept Paper: A National Center to Address Higher Education Policy, by Patrick M. Callan (March 1998, #98-1). Describes the purposes of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education.

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